

WILLARD (S.D.)

HISTORICAL ADDRESS

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

MEDICAL SOCIETY OF THE COUNTY OF ALBANY,

IN THE STATE OF NEW-YORK,

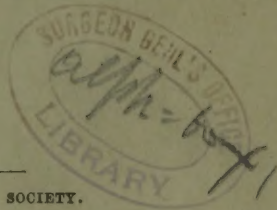
NOVEMBER 11, 1856,

BEING ITS SEMI-CENTENNIAL ANNIVERSARY MEETING.

BY SYLVESTER D. WILLARD, M. D.,

MEMBER OF THE SOCIETY.

PRINTED BY ORDER OF THE SOCIETY.



C. VAN BENTHUYSEN, PRINTER, ALBANY,

No. 407 Broadway.

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Surgeon Genl's Office.
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ADDRESS.

Mr. President and Gentlemen of the Society:

It is in compliance with an invitation from the committee having in charge the arrangements for this anniversary, united with that of the President, that I address you to-day.

Our meeting is characterized by more than accustomed interest. It chronicles the epoch of half a century to which our Society has just arrived, and the changes it has witnessed during this series of years that have now become a matter of history.

In a retrospective glance at the period of the Revolutionary war, we find there was no special advancement in medical science.

The courses of instruction in Philadelphia and New-York were suspended, and an incubus seemed to rest upon the profession. Necessity had indeed compelled an increased attention to anatomy, and did much to bring out latent talent for skilful surgery, and which was mostly employed in the army service. But surgeons were ill provided with those appliances which render their art to a great extent contributive to the wants and comforts of those who seek their aid. Untold sufferings were experienced in the army during our country's struggle for liberty, which might have been greatly mitigated or possibly altogether avoided, by the assistance of an efficient and well equipped corps of physicians and surgeons.

From the close of the war until the beginning of the present century, the means of education in the medical profession were still limited, and the mass of practitioners in a state of deplorable ignorance.

The advantages were but few for obtaining the rudiments of a common education, and the young man whose ambition led him to aspire to the medical profession, usually sought the instruction of some neighboring physician. Age and gray hairs in the in-

structor were considered qualifications far more requisite than either knowledge or skill, a fallacy of opinion which more than half a century has not fully eradicated, (although I would have it understood as existing in any other than an Albany public.)

The education of the medical student then was in almost every case obtained from private instruction. But certainly, a practitioner whose claims to scholarship were moderate, whose attainments in medical science were only the result of crude observations, without fixed principles by which to analyze, and reduce them to practice, and even these observations confined by a limited experience, could not be very well qualified to impart any great degree of instruction.

Moreover the law required of those seeking admission to the profession, no special attainments, and as a consequence the benefits accruing to the public from their services were often imaginary rather than real. As any man at his pleasure, without being deemed presumptuous, might assume the business of a physician, practitioners multiplied, and so did empirics who did great mischief to the sick, from neglect on the one hand, and untimely interference on the other.

The evils arising from such a condition of the profession, at length called loudly for an adequate remedy. This had been attempted in some of the New England States, and was effectually begun in the State of New-York by the passage of a law on the 4th April, 1806, for the organization of a State* and of County Medical Societies.

The grand object contemplated by this law, which was advocated by the most learned and able men of the State, and especially by those gifted statesmen, Van Ness, Clinton, and Kent, who at the time were members of the Legislature which enacted it, was the establishment of a board of censors in each County Society. This board was to consist of five members, and to act as a committee before which all students within the limits of each county should come for examination previous to being received into the medical profession. This system wisely proposed that all persons intending to practise medicine or surgery, should

*“The Medical Society of the State of New-York” is composed of representatives and permanent members. It meets pursuant to statute, in Albany on the first Tuesday of February each year. Until 1853 the representation was by one delegate from each county Medical Society, who held his office for four years. In 1853, the law was amended so that each society is now entitled to as many delegates as its county has representatives in Assembly. This gives the Medical Society of the county of Albany four delegates. Each Medical College in the State is also entitled to one delegate. Permanent members are selected annually from those whose term as delegate has expired. Until 1845 only two permanent members were elected each year. The number is now increased to sixteen. The Society has on its list about one hundred and forty surviving members, and is entitled one hundred and thirty-five delegates.

by a thorough course of instruction be prepared for the duties and responsibilities to be assumed. This preparation was to be tested by an examination before the censors of the society, and it proving satisfactory, the Board was empowered to bestow upon the candidate a license to practise. This board was particularly calculated to exert a protective and healthy influence upon both the profession and the public, and was the medium through which students gained access to the profession for many years. So it continued, until the more general establishment of Medical Colleges throughout this and adjoining States. The vastly superior inducements and advantages which these afford over private instructions, and their great ease of access has after the period of half a century, almost entirely superseded the necessity and the duties of this Board.

It was in conformity to this law of April 4th, 1806, that the physicians of the city and county of Albany, met on the 29th of July following, and organized the Medical Society of the County of Albany—the society which we represent here to-day, and whose Semi-Centennial Anniversary we now commemorate.

It seems suitable to this occasion that we briefly trace the history of the society through the half century which it has now completed.

It was nearly two hundred years at the time our society came into existence, since the building of Fort Orange (1623), which was the embryo of this capital. Around Fort Orange little hamlets had nestled until assuming the name of Beaverwyck it became a thriving and populous village. In 1686, Beaverwyck was incorporated a city under the name of Albany, the act being granted by Thomas Dongan, the Colonial Governor under the authority of King James the Second. From the erection of Fort Orange until the original members of this society came into active life, we ask almost in vain,—Who were the physicians and surgeons through this long period? Who filled the important places of guardians of the public health through these long years? To the ambition of those who would inscribe their names on the pages of our city's medical history, this silence concerning those who have preceded them, affords but little encouragement.

A solitary exception comes to our knowledge,—Abraham Staats, surgeon, came from Holland in 1642, and settled at Fort Orange. He was the first presiding officer of the Beaverwyck village council upon its organization, and several incidents indicate that he was a valuable and enterprising citizen. He became the owner of Fort Orange, and the ground on which it stood has

ever since remained in the family of his descendants. But of the colleagues and successors of Dr. Abraham Staats,* enquiry brings a silent response. Like others, they lived, performed their allotted task, and died.

“No farther seek their *merits* to disclose,
Or draw their *frailties* from their dread abode.”

There were present at the first meeting of the Medical Society of the county of Albany, held as I have already mentioned, on the 29th July, 1806, the following physicians: Drs. Wilhelmus Mancius, Hunloke Woodruff, William McClelland, John G. Knauff, and Charles D. Townsend, of Albany; Caleb Gauff and Augustus Harris, of Bethlehem; Cornelius Vrooman, jr., Joseph W. Hegeman, and Alexander G. Fonda, of Schenectady, which, until 1809, was a part of this county.

Dr. William Anderson and Dr. Elias Willard were elected censors, and were present at the ensuing meeting in October, at which time the by-laws of the society were adopted.

Of those men who constituted the original members of the society, it is not inappropriate that I should here speak particularly.

Dr. Wilhelmus Mancius was born in the county of Ulster, in this State, in the year 1738. He was the son of George Wilhelmus Mancius, a doctor in medicine and a minister of the Gospel in Ulster county, who came from Germany. He studied his profession with his father, and came to Albany to practise. He spoke both the high and low Dutch languages. He was a tall man, measuring over six feet, of commanding appearance, of eccentric habits, but possessed of agreeable manners, and a fund of good humor, which gave him great popularity.

I learn from one who was once his patient, that he enjoyed a large and remunerative practice. His office was situated on what is now known as 581 Broadway, a property which he owned, and which is now occupied by his grandson, Mr. George Mancius, as a drug store, he being the last and only surviving male descendant of the family. Dr. Mancius was, at the time of his death a partner of Dr. Hunloke Woodruff. By careful observation he had attained considerable skill, but he had less knowledge of theory than his more learned partner. As might be expected, in the discussions on medical topics which frequently arose between them, he was most often the weaker party, but his final retort, in order to close these arguments was, “*Ah! de cure! Hunloke, de cure is de great ting—I cure.*” A rebuke so keen the theorist

* On the 11th of July, 1664, the Mohegan Indians burned the dwelling of Dr. Staats; his wife and two servants were consumed with it.—O’Callaghan’s *History of New Netherlands*, vol. 2, p. 519.

felt, because with all his philosophy, it is said he possessed the least skill.

I may be pardoned for alluding to another incident which would scarcely add dignity to a member of our profession at this day. The doctor, it is said, attended many of the wealthy farmers surrounding the city, and never scrupled to draw liberally upon their well supplied stores. He was punctual to settle these accounts, but always found out first the amount of them before presenting his own bill. It was a strange circumstance that no matter how large the amounts were, "it was exactly the amount of his bill." Shoe bills, and others were settled in the same manner. We are told that on one occasion, Richard Smith, a rich farmer, who had settled with the doctor in this way before, made out his bill; it was found on comparison that the doctor's "just matched it." He then recollected that he had omitted certain items which could not escape the doctor's memory when mentioned. The result was a balance in his favor, and the doctor promptly paid it over.

Dr. Mancius was chairman at the first meeting of the society, but his name does not appear again on its minutes. He died on the 22d October, 1808, at the age of seventy years.

Dr. Hunloke Woodruff was born in Elizabethtown, New Jersey, and was a descendant by his maternal ancestry of Chancellor Hyde, afterwards Earl of Clarendon, so famous in English politics two centuries ago. He was graduated at Princeton College about the year 1774. His instructor in medicine was Dr. Malaci Treat.

At the commencement of the revolutionary war, Dr. Woodruff espoused the cause of the colonies, and was appointed surgeon in one of the New-York regiments, in which he served until peace was declared. He accompanied the northern army to Canada, and was at the siege and taking of Fort St. John. He was with Col. Gansevoort during the whole siege of Fort Stanwix, and attended General Sullivan in his expedition against the hostile Indians of western New-York.

As the army was proceeding toward Montreal, the doctor and an officer were marching together. Coming to a tree they passed it on opposite sides and were almost together again, when a cannon ball from the enemy whistled between them and struck the tree. Neither felt any extraordinary effect from the passage of the ball, and the circumstance the doctor used as a practical demonstration against the prevailing opinion that the passage of a cannon ball would by concussion cause the death of any person near to whom it might pass.

At the siege of Fort Stanwix, Captain Craig and several others ventured beyond the lines of safety, and were surprised by Indians. Some of the party were scalped and left for dead. A faithful dog who had accompanied them, licked the blood from his master's face, and then went to the fort and created an alarm which led to the discovery. Dr. Woodruff was one of the number who went from the fort in search of the party. Standing at length beside a body which he supposed dead, and whose visage was obscured by masses of blood, he was startled by a low sepulchral voice, exclaiming, "Doctor, don't you know me?" The scalped and wounded man proved no other than his friend, Capt. Craig, the owner of the dog. Dr. Woodruff took him to the fort, where with much care he recovered, and survived many years.

After the conclusion of the war, Dr. Woodruff settled at Albany, where he acquired quite an extensive practice. In the last years of his life he was greatly afflicted with scrofula, which gradually increased and finally caused his death, on the 4th July, 1811. His age was fifty-nine years. He was a man of philosophic mind, characterized by charity and hospitality, valuing money only as it contributed to the comforts of his family and friends. By the public he was highly esteemed.

An excellent likeness of him, painted by an Albany artist, Mr. Ames—is in possession of his family.

The next on the list is Dr. William McClelland, who was born in the Shire of Galloway in Scotland, in the year 1769. He received his medical education at Edinburgh, and immediately afterwards came to America, and began his professional career in Albany. His talents and his medical attainments secured for him a large practice, and his position in his profession was deservedly eminent. His early advantages had been of a superior order, and I believe he ranked at that time as the best educated physician in the city. His social habits led him into an extreme of living, quite common in those times, and undoubtedly had an influence in shortening his days. Upon the organization of the Medical Society of the State of New York, Dr. McClelland was elected its first President.

In 1811, (Jan. 8,) he formed a partnership with Dr. William Bay, who had a few months previous taken up his residence here. This was terminated by the death of Dr. McClelland, which occurred on the 29th January, 1812, he having just completed the forty-third year of his age.

Drs. William Anderson and Joseph W. Hegeman were both

born and educated at Princeton in New-Jersey. There they both received their license to practise. They removed to Schenectady and were associated as partners in business. Both were men of gentlemanly and courteous manners, and were alike esteemed good practitioners. Dr. Anderson made a journey to New-Orleans, but on his return passage to New-York he was seized with yellow fever and died. This was in 1811. Dr. Hegeman removed to Cincinnati a few years subsequently to this event ; and in 1827 to Vicksburgh, Mississippi, where he continued several years in practice, with a brother of Dr. Anderson. In 1832 he lost his three daughters, who died of cholera, within twelve hours of each other. He deceased in 1837.

Dr. Cornelius Vrooman was the second son of Simon Vrooman, a citizen of Schenectady, where he was born. His classical education was obtained at Union College, though his name does not appear on the catalogue as a graduate of that institution. He attended medical lectures at the University of Pennsylvania, and began the practice of his profession in his native city. He rapidly won the reputation of being a skilful physician—a reputation which still attaches to his memory.

Like all the Vrooman race, he was over six feet in height. His manners were easy and agreeable, and he possessed a fluency in conversation, with a fine, lively expression of countenance, admirably calculated to gain popularity.

An incident is related which indicates that he was kind-hearted and generous to the poor. Having occasion to leave home, he took with him a plentiful supply of shirts, and finding a man greatly in need of some, he gave him several. It was a kind of charity which his good sister did not commend, for it was by her needle that they were wrought. To her admonition against such alms-giving, he only replied that “ he didn’t like to see a poor man suffer.”

Dr. Vrooman was passionate, (how unlike physicians of the present day !) but it is said the paroxysms were exceedingly brief.

He relinquished practice at an early period, on account of being appointed agent for Mrs. Campbell, then one of the most wealthy persons in Schenectady—a sufficient proof of his integrity and business capacity.

He died of consumption, in December, 1811, at the early age of 30 years.

Dr. Charles D. Townsend, was born in Goshen, Orange county, in this State, on the 15th April, 1778. He was one of twelve children, who with a single exception, lived to an advanced age.

He commenced the study of medicine in Albany, under the supervision of Drs. Mancius and Woodruff, and attended the medical lectures at Columbia College in 1802. During the time of his residence in New-York, he was also a pupil of the celebrated surgeon Dr. Wright Post. He commenced practice in Rhinebeck, but removed to Albany in 1803. He was the first Secretary of this society, and was successively elected to its various offices. In 1807 he read before it a paper on "puerperal fever." He was elected permanent member of the State Medical Society, and received from it the honorary degree of Doctor of medicine, in 1830.

For many years, until near the period of his death, which occurred on the 19th December, 1847, he was extensively engaged in practice, rendering alike service to the poor and the rich.

As a practitioner of medicine and surgery, he was esteemed prudent and skilful, and acquired the unlimited confidence of the public.

Dr. Townsend was firm in his religious convictions, and his life was in accordance with the christian principles he professed from his early years.

Dr. John G. Knauff, was born in Germany. He was a physician and an apothecary, confining himself, however, more exclusively to the duties of the latter. I am informed that he was a man of sound education, but being retiring and unsocial in his habits, he made few friends. He was the first treasurer of the society. In 1807, he read before it a paper on the "revulsive effects of blood-letting;" and in 1808, one on "the use of Hyosciamus Niger." In 1809 he resigned his seat as member of the society. His death occurred not long afterwards.

Dr. Caleb Gauff resided in the extreme south of the town of Bethlehem, where for many years he was a respectable practitioner. He is remembered by some of the old citizens of Bethlehem; but little definite information can be given concerning him. He was probably past the meridian of life when he met with this society, and his career terminated at a period not distant from the time of its organization.

Conspicuous among the medical men of Albany, at the time of which we are speaking, was Dr. Elias Willard. He was a descendant of Major Simon Willard, the common ancestor of the family in America of that name. He was born in Harvard, Massachusetts, on the 7th January, 1756. His father was unable to afford him a collegiate education, but placed him under private instruction, where at an early age he made a considerable progress in acquiring the Latin and Greek languages. At the age

of eighteen years he commenced the study of medicine. One year afterwards the war broke out which separated the colonies from Great Britain, when he, with his father and elder brother promptly responded to the country's call,—and witnessed its first bloody struggle for liberty in the battle of Lexington.

After a brief service as a common soldier, he obtained an appointment as assistant in the military hospital, temporarily established at Roxbury, under the charge of Dr. Haywood. Subsequently, when a new hospital was established at Boston, Dr. Willard was appointed assistant under Dr. John Warren, brother of the lamented patriot General and Doctor, Joseph Warren, who fell at Bunker's Hill.

In 1777, at the age of twenty-one years, he received the appointment of surgeon to a regiment from the province of Maine, commanded by Colonel Frost, which was brought into active service by its removal to White Plains, in this State. He was successively removed with the army to German Flats and Ticonderoga, continuing with it through the whole of the contest, and sharing in the sufferings it had to encounter. After leaving the military hospital in 1785, he purchased Bemis Heights, the battle ground near Saratoga, where he commenced private practice, and resided, with the exception of a year spent in Canada, until 1801, when he removed to this city.

Here he acquired warm friends and an excellent practice. His manners were agreeable and courteous, and his deportment always consistent and dignified.

In 1811, the society demanded of Dr. Willard, in no kind spirit, the components of a certain remedy he used in cancer. For some reason (and it is probable that he was not as yet himself fully satisfied as to its positive virtues), he did not promptly comply with the demand, and the society passed a resolution by which he was expelled.

This act, however did not lessen him in public estimation, and the Medical Society of Massachusetts elected him to honorary membership in 1814, an evidence of the esteem and undiminished confidence in which he was held by the medical profession of his native State.

He died in this city on the 20th March, 1827, in the seventy-first year of his age, having been more than fifty-one years in professional life.

Dr. Willard* possessed enthusiastic love for his country. But the "distinguishing traits of his character were his devotion to the duties of his profession, and his ardent piety." "He be-

came at an early age impressed with the truths of religion and his long life was that of a consistent and exemplary Christian."

Dr. Augustus Harris, another of the original members, was born in the county of Rensselaer, on the 17th July, 1776. He was the son of Dr. Nicholas Harris, with whom he pursued the study of medicine. He was licensed by the Hon. John Lansing, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, in this city, on the 4th August, 1800. He commenced practice in Bethlehem, in this county, in 1803, and remained there fourteen years. He then removed to the town of Van Buren, in Onondaga county, where he continued to practise until 1821, when he turned his attention to the pursuit of agriculture. Dr. Harris is now in the 81st year of his age, and here is a letter in his own hand writing signifying his desire to be with us to-day, but declaring that "age and the infirmities attending, prevent his venturing so far from home." His heart is with us, and we inexpressibly regret his absence.

The last of this number is Dr. Alexander G. Fonda, who was born in Schenectady, on the 17th August, 1785. He obtained his medical education under the direction of Dr. Archibald H. Adams of that city, then an extensive practitioner, and received his license to practise in May, 1806, two months previous to the first meeting of this Society. For many years he pursued, in his native city, the profession of his choice. Several years since, he retired from its active duties to the enjoyment and quietude of domestic life, in the tranquility of which he is spending a green and vigorous old age. *Half a hundred years ago he was here*, one of the few who met for the first time with this Society. *Half a hundred years have rolled by, and, gentlemen, he is here with us to-day.* We extend to him a most cordial greeting. We bid him welcome,—and if emotions of sorrow arise within him, as the past and the recollection of the little band with whom he first met, and of whom only he and one other survive,—float before his memory,—let him be cheered by our rejoicings that he is privileged to meet with us on this fiftieth anniversary of our Society.

May the evening of his life, and that of his surviving associate at the first meeting of this Society, be bright and cheerful, and when they, like their former cotemporaries, are summoned hence, may they approach their rest

"Like one who draws the drapery of his couch
Around him, and lies down to pleasant dreams."

• His brother, Dr. Moses Willard, was likewise surgeon in the army. He practised a short time in Albany but never united with the Society. He was an occasional contributor to the *New-York Medical and Physical Journal*, was elected honorary member of the State Medical Society and fellow of the College of Physicians and Surgeons.

Such then were the circumstances which led to the establishment of Medical Societies, and such were the original members of this body.

The faculties of Columbia College, and the College of Physicians and Surgeons of New-York, generously gave notice to several of the newly organized medical societies, that they would each admit* gratuitously to a course of their lectures one such student as each society should recommend.

In 1809, Dr. McClelland proposed as worthy to be the recipient of this generosity, a youth then a student in his office, who had recently graduated at Union College with scholastic distinction. He accordingly received the recommendation of this society, and two years afterwards, at the early age of nineteen and a half, he graduated at the College of Physicians and Surgeons with a reputation still more enviable.

That student, gentlemen, was THEODORIC ROMEYN BECK—a name we speak—a name that is spoken with reverence in the highest circles of literature and science, in Europe as well as America. He became a member of this society in 1811, and was early advanced to all its honors.

In return he bestowed upon it its brightest laurels. His career so recently closed in our midst—its morning—its noonday—its evening, was one of bright, unclouded lustre. His eulogy† has already been pronounced in our hearing. His fame for learning is written on the pages of the science he loved and taught, and his memory will be cherished by generations to come as long as that science finds record in the annals of time.

For many years the meetings of the society were held quarterly and some member was appointed to read a dissertation at each meeting. These papers were often interesting and not unfrequently gave rise to pleasant and profitable discussions. The by-laws did not require an address by the President at the annual meeting until 1838.

Efforts were made to procure a library as early as 1810, and the first work purchased was the Medical and Physical journal, published by T. Bradley, M. D., and others, consisting of twenty-one octavo volumes, at a cost of one hundred and five dollars. A resolution was passed to tax members three dollars per quarter until the debt should be liquidated. This work was afterwards sold by the society to Dr. Charles D. Townsend. Efforts were

* The colleges withdrew this privilege in 1810.

† Eulogy upon the Life and Character of THEODORIC ROMEYN BECK, M. D. LL. D., delivered before the Medical Society of the State of New-York, and the Legislature, by Frank Hastings Hamilton, M. D. Published by order of the Senate, February 1856. See also, Trans. State Med. Soc. 1856.

made in 1820 to establish another library, and they seem to have been continued for many years. It does not appear that the library ever numbered over seventy-six bound volumes at any one time, and an accumulation of medical journals and pamphlets. Among these were some valuable works. I remember particularly "Bateman on Cutaneous diseases" with an atlas of plates, beautifully illustrating the subject.

Every few years the subject of a library has been revived, and a committee directed to find the books belonging to it, a task which they usually consigned to their successors in office. It has been a fruitful source of business to the society; when every other failed, the *library* was seized for discussion, and a new committee appointed to find the books, and report upon their condition. In 1851, a report was made and adopted, in accordance with which a reading room was secured, and the library was placed in it, and all the leading medical journals of the country were subscribed for. This plan was followed for two years, until the funds were exhausted and the society involved in a considerable debt. It was then deemed *impracticable*. Indeed physicians did not feel at liberty to spend hours away from their offices at a reading room. Besides, it gave an appearance of elegant leisure, which is an index adverse to a favorable reputation in medicine;—a criterion by which even the most youthful practitioner is unwilling to be judged.

The reading room was at length abandoned, and the *remains* of the library presented to the Albany Medical College in 1855.

To one who supposes the society has passed harmoniously through half a century without collisions or occasions to discipline and expel members, it may be answered such is not the case. There have been times when such measures were undoubtedly expedient. Such is the history of nearly all societies. But the occasions which gave rise to wide differences, and many of those who were immediately concerned in them, have passed away, and the ruffled waters have become smooth. It is not our purpose to put them again in commotion. I design as I proceed to allude only to a few of the subjects which were calculated to create differences of opinion.

The laws of this State have, during half a century, regulated the practice of medicine within its limits, by the establishment of a State, and of County Medical Societies, the terms of admission to which these laws prescribe, and those only are licensed practitioners who comply with its requirements. There exists on the statute book a penalty for any other who shall practice medicine

or surgery. The law of 1844, modifying the law of 1836, does not abolish this penalty, as has frequently, though erroneously, been supposed. But the power given to medical colleges evidently supersedes it, by allowing them to grant licenses for the whole State, and which are not affected by any other consideration. Now, it was the object of this society, from the time of its organization, to draw wide the lines of distinction between the licensed and unlicensed practitioner. It frowned upon every man in the profession who did not regard the law and make application to enrol his name with it. It held the spirit of executing the law to the very letter, and of inflicting its full penalty upon any who did not immediately comply with its requisitions. Such a policy established for the people a *medical police*; but it was an extreme policy, and led to frequent and annoying suits in law, causing no small expense to the society as well as trouble to special committees. Some of these suits dragged their way to a weary termination. The plan of eradicating empiricism by a resort to legal measures against it, at length assumed the appearance of professional tyranny and persecution. In medicine, as in politics, men are not so easily and favorably won by such ultra measures, and the society was always further from the accomplishment of its real purpose, when these suits were terminated, than when they began, although some, and I am not sure but all of them were decided in its favor. Besides, the prosecution of these suits was disagreeable and undignified.

At one time our society required that all physicians practising in the city and county, even though they had been graduated at medical colleges in other States, or a foreign university, should not be admitted to fellowship until they had submitted to an examination before the Board of Censors; a requirement which was not likely to be either promptly or cheerfully complied with; and yet the physician who resisted such a demand was considered unlicensed, and in the eye of the law is so regarded at the present day.

Another topic upon which a difference of opinion was always likely to be exercised, was the non observance of Medical Ethics. In other—and perhaps in days when the members of our society were less amiable than now, violations of professional civilities did occur. These violations led to complaints, investigating committees, reports, and other measures, not calculated to heal personal animosities, or promote the interests of the society.

When the law of 1844 was passed, which abolished certain distinctions between educated and uneducated physicians, the society appointed a committee to take into consideration the

propriety of petitioning the Legislature to repeal a law that appeared so unjust.

The report of that committee—the chairman of which was Dr. Hun,—was a clear dispassionate argument in behalf of the true dignity of the profession, which I would commend to the careful attention of every member of the society. It concludes: “We have laws enough and good laws. Quackery must be suppressed, not by legislation but by enlightening public opinion as to its dangers. The dignity and respectability of our profession, is to be promoted not by asking for legal privileges, but by an increase of individual zeal and a more cordial cooperation. It is a great error to suppose that a repeal of the restrictive laws puts the physician on a level with the quack, and takes away the barrier which separated them. The barrier which separates the two classes is formed by the higher attainments and honorable deportment of the members of the latter—and this is a barrier which it depends on us to make higher and stronger. It is one which quackery will not surmount, and which no legislative enactments can break down.”

Since the adoption of this report there has been a disposition to abide by its recommendations. Law suits have been abolished and contentions have terminated. And if within a period of ten or twelve years any have been so *inconsiderate* as to violate medical ethics, others have been so forbearing as not to present the case to the committee, which, by a resolution of the society, it became their duty to do. The resolution to which I refer, (passed 1846) required that when the offence against medical ethics (the code published by the State Medical Society, is the one adopted by this society) should come under the observation of any member, he was held bound to report the same to the committee on medical ethics, and if, in its judgment, the cause was sufficient the complaint was to be laid before the society. *Never flinching* from what they are held bound to do, it argues favorably to the urbanity and high sense of honor our members pursue towards each other, when I assure you that since the adoption of that resolution *no complaint has been preferred*. Of the committee but one remains, and I suspect he may have forgotten the office with which he is honored.

The attendance at the early meetings of this society were necessarily small, on account of the limited number of members, and for many years the names of those present were not recorded by the several secretaries. In 1830 there were present at the annual meeting forty-six members ; in 1831, forty-eight members, and

in 1832 the number was swelled to sixty. At no preceding period had this been anything like equaled. It might be inferred that a growing interest in medical science had occasioned this large attendance, or that in some way the fearful pestilence which was fast approaching our country had influenced this assemblage of medical men. Such was not the case however. But the history of our society requires that the truth should be unfolded. Certain claims to the presidency of the society had excited a party spirit. These were strongly urged on the one hand and as strongly contested on the other. In 1832, the party whose candidate for President was Dr. Alden March, at length succeeded in the election. Dr. March was re-elected in 1833, there being forty-six members present at the annual meeting. This excitement did not immediately subside, for in 1834 the number present exceeded that of any year of which the annals of the society furnish a record. There were present in 1834 sixty-five members, and they elected to the presidency Dr. Barent P. Staats. In 1835 there were fifty members present; after that time the number decreased, and has not in many years exceeded twenty-four at any of the annual meetings. Immediately succeeding the anniversary meeting of 1835, came a reaction, and at several of the quarterly meetings following there was not a *quorum* present.

These spirited elections gave rise to some personal feelings, but like many others they were of short duration, when the occasion that created them had passed.

Aside from the preceding statement, is it not a matter of surprise, that in 1834 the society should number sixty-five members in attendance, while in 1856 with a population in the county increased from 59,000 to 103,000 there should be only forty-five members on the roll who ever attend its meetings, and of these never more than twenty-four in attendance at one time? And yet it will be promptly conceded, that the city and county was never better supplied with regularly educated physicians, than at the present day.

To the individual efforts of some of our members, rather than those of our organization, our city is indebted for its beautiful Hospital and Dispensary; but it was here however that the subject which led to their establishment was first freely discussed.

The society has licensed to practice, as shown by its records, thirty-five students; but I believe the number is considerably greater than this, and that the minutes on this point are incomplete.

Our society has had two hundred and thirteen members. It

has furnished seven of the thirty-two Presidents of the State Medical Society, and they have occupied that presidency fourteen of the fifty years of its existence.

Thirteen of its members have been or still are professors in medical colleges. Some have removed from the county, thus dissolving their connection with us. A few have become *heterodox* in medical science, as we accept the signification of the term, and have thus withdrawn from our association, while others have labored on with unwearied devotion and fidelity, until the hour came for them to waive us adieu, as they departed from the shores of time.

Important links would be wanting in the chain of our history, in order to connect the past and present generation of our society, if I should omit to mention, particularly, several who have been immediately associated with the original members, who have been important actors in the society, and who have, with a single exception, terminated their relations to it. And besides an incomplete history, there would be injustice done to the memory of those who have been its honored ornaments.

And the first of these is Dr. Peter Wendell. He was a descendant of one of the ancient Dutch families of Albany, where he was born on the 3d of June, 1786. He obtained his early and classical education here, and here he pursued the study of his profession, under the instruction of Dr. Wm. McClelland. He attended two courses of lectures at the University of Pennsylvania, where he listened with enthusiasm to the teachings of that distinguished professor and patriot, Dr. Benjamin Rush, which, says the biographer of Dr. Wendell, "constituted the guide of his practice in after years."

Upon his return from Philadelphia, in the spring of 1807, he opened an office in this city, and immediately united with this society, then in its infancy. The auspices under which he commenced his professional career were most favorable. He was surrounded by a large circle of influential friends, and it was at a time when there were "not more than five practitioners of eminence in Albany, and all of them advanced beyond the meridian of life." Prompt and attentive to his patients he rapidly won reputation, so that his practice was, it is believed, more extensive and lucrative than that of any physician in the city.

Dr. Wendell was at an early period elected by this society, a delegate to the State Medical Society, where he was in a few years elected permanent member, and for a long while filled the office of censor in that society for this district. In 1813 he read a dis-

sertation before this society on the "stimulant effects of cold." In 1823 he was elected Regent of the University by the Legislature of the State. He was faithful and attentive in the great variety of business which came before that Board, and made himself intimately acquainted with all its details.

He at length became, with a single exception, senior member of the Board, and was elected its Chancellor in 1842. This honorable position he continued to occupy until the close of his life.

To the State Library and the State Cabinet of Natural History he gave, while a Regent, great care and attention.

Dr. Wendell felt the importance and the responsibility which the medical profession sustain towards the public, and it was always his great object to promote its interests, and to uphold its dignity.

While most of the members of this society were favored with his acquaintance, many of them enjoyed his personal friendship, and his well remembered face passes in memory before them to-day.

After a practice of forty-two years, Dr. Wendell died suddenly of disease of the heart, at his residence on Elk-street, October 31st, 1849.

The next in this order is Dr. James Low, and I shall present this brief sketch as I find it among the list of distinguished physicians in Thacher's American Medical Biography.

"James Low, M. D., was born at Albany, December 9th, 1781. His early education was completed at Schenectady. He commenced the study of medicine with Dr. McClelland, and after three years spent with him, he went to Edinburgh, where he spent four years, attending the lectures of the University. During a part of the time he was a private pupil of Dr. John Murray, late eminent lecturer on chemistry. Dr. Low's standing among his fellow students, may be estimated from the fact that he was elected one of the Presidents of the Royal Physical Society of Edinburgh. Dr. Low travelled in England and Scotland, and returned to his native city in 1808, and commenced practice with Dr. McClelland." He then became a member of this society.

"His reputation as a learned and skilful physician, an able and expert surgeon, became widely diffused. He was a man of science."

His health during the last three years of his life became greatly impaired, and after much suffering he died in Albany, February 3d, 1822, having just completed the fortieth year of his age.

His published works are :

1. Dissertation Inauguralis de Tetano, 1807.
2. Epidemic Pneumonia.
3. Researches on the light manifested in the Combustion of Inflammable substances.
4. Observations on moth, which prove destructive to bees.
5. Hooper's Vade Mecum (with notes).
6. Notes to Bell on Venereal Diseases.

He frequently read papers before this society, among which was one on "cancer," one on "hydatids," and one on "paralysis of the bladder."

"His loss to society was great. He bid fair at one time to become one of the first physicians in the State. He lectured during several years on chemistry, with great acceptance, showing familiarity with that subject. He was well versed in the languages, enthusiastic in poetry, and a man of extensive and varied learning."

The next on the roll of the society, whose name I shall mention is that of Dr. Jonathan Eights. He was born in this city on the 26th November, 1773, and obtained his classical education here, under the instruction of the late George Merchant. In the year 1790 he commenced the study of medicine in the office of Drs. Mancius and Woodruff, with whom he remained until April 1795.

He was then examined by two physicians, and received their certificate of his competency to practise. This certificate was filed in the office of the Clerk of the county. The first few months of his professional life he spent in one of the small towns adjoining the city. "A severe bilious remittent and intermittent fever, which was raging there with great violence," determined him upon this course. After the disease subsided, he removed to Canajoharie, in Montgomery county, where he remained until 1797, when he went to Philadelphia, and spent nearly a year, with a view to improving himself in surgery. He returned to Montgomery county, and became engaged in an extensive and laborious practice. On the 1st May, 1810, he removed to Albany, and without delay united with this society, to whose interests he continued warmly attached through his whole life.

He soon acquired a varied and extensive practice, and devoted his whole energy exclusively to it.

In 1822 and '23, he was one to the associate contributors to the Medical and Physical Journal, published in New-York. "An

account of two cases of neuralgia," and one case of "carcenoma of the uterus," are among his contributions.

In 1830 and '31, he was President of the State Medical Society, having several years before represented this society as delegate. The subject of his first annual address before that body was "vaccination," and of the second, "puerperal fever." At the conclusion of the former, he paid a just and eloquent tribute to the memory of his friend, the late Dr. Alexander Coventry of Utica, then recently deceased, and who was an Ex-president of the society.

Says the reviewer of the address on puerperal fever, "this interesting and important subject is discussed by him in a very able and judicious manner. Dr. Eights is evidently a clear and accurate thinker, and his style is concise, and bears evidence of considerable practical judgment."

He was President of this society in 1814, '15 and '16, and was again re-elected in 1841, and upon this occasion read before it an address on the subject of "phlegmasia dolens."

Dr. Eights was well versed in medical literature, and accumulated a large and well selected library. His published cases were narrated with great clearness and brevity, but his almost constant professional engagements and his love of reading gave him at first but little time for writing, and this was at length succeeded by a habitual disinclination to record his valuable observations.

Dr. Eights was a man of quiet, dignified manners, of purity of life, a skilful physician, at once, an example and an ornament to the profession.

At the time of his death, which occurred on the 10th August 1848, he had spent fifty-three years in professional life, and was the oldest practitioner in Albany.

With a view of preserving the chronological order of membership, I shall now speak of one, who longer than any other, has occupied a prominent position in the medical profession here, and with whom you are all so familiar that I cannot forbear to recapitulate in his presence the more prominent facts of his history. I allude, as you all know, to our venerable father, Dr. William Bay, whose presence here to-day is to us a source of profound pleasure.

But the omission to speak particularly of one who has been connected with our society for forty-six of the fifty years of its existence, would be unpardonable, even though I am to speak in his hearing. For a few moments I crave his indulgence.

Albany gave birth to Dr. Bay, gentlemen, nearly three years

before the declaration of our National Independence, (Oct. 14, 1773.) Here he passed the days of his boyhood, and procured his early education. His "father having possessions in Claverack, Columbia county, subsequently removed to that town, and from thence his son after some years, proceeded to Princeton College, then the great literary school of the Middle States. He remained at this institution until his senior year, when he was obliged to leave in consequence of ill health."

"In 1794, having determined to study medicine, he repaired to New-York, and became a private pupil of Dr. William Pitt Smith, an eminent practitioner of that day. Columbia College was then the only medical school in the State. Among its professors while Dr. Bay was in attendance, were Smith, Post, Mitchell, Rogers, Hosack and Hammersly. Dr. Smith, in addition to his other offices, held the arduous and responsible one of Health Officer to the port, and in the discharge of its laborious duties fell a victim to inflammation of the lungs, in 1795. In the interval between his death and the appointment of his successor, (Dr. Richard Bailey,) being about four months, the office was temporarily filled by Dr. William Bay. He next became a pupil of the eminent Dr. Samuel Lathom Mitchell, and remained in his office until he graduated as doctor in medicine, in May, 1797.

The subject of his inaugural thesis was, "The operation of Pestilential Fluids upon the Large Intestines, termed by Nosologists, Dysentery," This was published by T. & J. Swords, 8vo., pp. 109 : 1797.

A review of this dissertation was published in the New-York Medical Repository, (vol. 1, p. 110) and occupies over six pages. The review concludes thus :—"Whatever variety of opinion or discordancy of facts may exist on this subject, we are persuaded that the most perfect unanimity will prevail in considering the principles set forth by Mr. Bay, and supported by so many powerful arguments, as highly interesting to the science of medicine, and the welfare of mankind ; and we are convinced the same unanimity will be felt in ascribing to our author, the praise of diligence, ingenuity, and a comprehensive survey of the subject on which he treats. This early fruit of his studies, worthy a more advanced age and mature experience, leaves us no room to doubt that his future professional career will be alike honorable to himself and useful to his country."

Dr. Bay returned from New-York to his home in Claverack, where he immediately began the pursuit of his profession. His business and his reputation alike rapidly increased, and his skill

was sought throughout an extensive district.—But he found a country practice exceedingly laborious. He was accordingly induced to remove to Albany, which he did in 1810, and almost immediately formed a business relation with Dr. William McClelland ; this, however, was terminated in a few months by the death of the latter. Here in his native city, he soon became a leading practitioner, and so continued until advancing years led him to retire from the more active duties of his profession.

Dr. Bay is known as a skilful accoucheur, and his has been a large and valuable experience, and in difficult cases his counsel has frequently been solicited by his medical brethren, and always held in high esteem.

In point of professional seniority Dr. Bay ranked next to Dr. Elights, but since the death of the latter he has been by many years the oldest practitioner in this community.

There are those present whose memory will revert with pleasure to the Jubilee Dinner given by the medical profession to our venerable father, on the accomplishment of the first half century of his professional career. But this was nearly ten years ago, and, gentlemen, it is nearly sixty-one years since he was acting as Health Officer at the port of New-York. Who that sees him moving about the city with so much vigor and elasticity, would suppose this ?

[To Dr. Bay]—Patriarch in Medicine : We rejoice that you too have been spared to meet with us on this anniversary—not as an original member of our society indeed—but as one whose professional experience extends years beyond the period of its organization. Yours, sir, has been an enviable career. You have achieved sufficient of fame, and now surrounded by a generation in your profession who delight to do you honor, may the evening of your life draw on, gently as fades the light of day.

Intimately associated with those whom I have already mentioned, and who for a period of years occupied a high rank in the profession here, and sustained honorable relations towards this society, were Drs. John Stearns and Platt Williams. Dr. Stearns was State Senator from the district of Saratoga, and at the close of his Senatorial office he removed to Albany and united with this society, at the same time with Dr. Bay, Oct. 14, 1810. A favorable reputation had already preceded him here. He had acquired considerable celebrity in the profession by being the first to draw its attention to the wonderful efficacy of ergot, in promoting the contractile power of the uterus, and thus facilitating lingering labor. His communication on this subject was published

in the New-York Medical Repository, 1807. The reputation of this article of the *Materia Medica* has been widely increased and is familiarly known to every practitioner. Whether the result of Dr. Stearns' observation has been more productive of rescuing or destroying fetal life, we need not now inquire. It argues nothing against the true value of science, because it has been in ignorance misapplied.

In a somewhat extensive and successful practice, Dr. Stearns became unfortunate in losing a series of cases of puerperal fever. It was not then, as now, understood that this disease is contagious and may be communicated from one lying-in patient to another by the hand or clothing of the accoucheur. The mystery of its appearance in his practice only, and the fatality of its termination, keenly oppressed his truly sensitive mind, and led him at length to abandon his practice in this city.

He removed to New-York in 1818 where he resumed his business with greater success, and in which he continued until 1849, when he died of erysipelas, at the advanced age of 75 years.

He was elected delegate to the State Medical Society, from this body, and was soon after elected its President, an office he held for four years, a greater period than it has been filled by any other. This may be considered a befitting expression of undiminished confidence in his skill and integrity, by his professional brethren throughout the State. It was bestowed at a time when his reputation was in danger of ruin.

Dr. Platt Williams was graduated at Williams College in the class of 1804, and received his diploma in medicine at Columbia College in New-York. He became a member of this society in 1816, and was always devoted to its welfare, and prompt in his attendance at its meetings.

He was President of the society in 1828, having represented it in the State Medical Society in 1825.

As a physician, Dr. Williams occupied a prominent position here, and was strenuous in his efforts to secure to his patients the benefits accruing from a proper system of diet during their illness; a subject that had attracted less attention in the profession thirty years ago than now.

After thirty years of toil in the discharge of professional duties, in 1845 he withdrew from the society, and removed to the county of Oneida, where he now resides. Bodily indisposition prevents him from sharing with us the festivities of this fiftieth anniversary.

There remain others of whom the occasion would more than justify my speaking, among whom are Cooper and Lathrop, and George Upfold, now the Right Reverend Bishop of the Diocese of Indiana, Webster and Spaulding, Tully, Christopher C. Yates, and Lewis C. Beck, Henry Van O'Linda, and Green; but I shall conclude with the notice of one other, who, within the memory of nearly all present, was assiduously engaged in the every day duties incident to the life of a physician. I allude to Dr. Joel A. Wing.

Dr. Wing was born in Berkshire county Massachusetts, on the 13th of August, 1788, where his early days were spent. Having determined upon entering the medical profession, he became a pupil of Dr. John De La Mater, (since a distinguished professor in the Medical school, at Cleaveland, Ohio.) During the period of his pupilage he directed his attention especially to the science of Anatomy, and prosecuted private dissections with great zeal. He devoted himself to surgery also, but in early life he abandoned it as a speciality, on account of imperfect vision.

He became a licentiate of the Medical Society of Montgomery county, in 1811, and the ensuing winter attended the medical lectures at the College of Physicians and Surgeons in New-York.

He returned to Columbia county in this State, and commenced practice. A few months after, on the recommendation of Prof. John Watts, he was appointed surgeon in the army, an appointment he knew nothing of until he received his commission. This compliment to his early attainments he seldom mentioned. He remarked, however, to an intimate friend, "I carried the commission in my pocket for two days, and then sent it with my resignation, to the department at Washington." In 1814 having been appointed surgeon to a garrison of the army stationed near Albany, he removed to this city and assumed the charge of it.

In 1816 he united with this society and ever continued one of its warmest and most reliable friends, filling some one of its various offices for many years. He was elected its President in 1826 and 1827.

In 1832 he became a member of the State Medical Society, and was elected President of that body in 1843, while absent from the country.

In 1825 Williams College conferred upon him the honorary degree of Doctor of Medicine. He was for several years, until the period of his illness, one of the managers of the New-York State Lunatic Asylum, and was active in securing to it the services of its late distinguished superintendent, Dr. Brigham.

Dr. Wing spent thirty-eight of the forty-one years of his professional life, in Albany, and in private practice few physicians became more extensively engaged. So exact was his system, that at the close of his practice he could refer to any prescription of importance that he had made within twenty-five years.

In 1832, while engaged nearly every hour in the twenty-four, scarcely allowing himself any rest or relaxation during the prevalence of the cholera, he was violently attacked with that fearful malady. His recovery was considered by his professional brethren, who were prompt and unwearied in their devotions to him, one of the most remarkable that occurred during the season. But he never afterwards enjoyed uniform good health, and in 1843 was obliged to relinquish his business under no flattering prospect of recovery, and repair to the mild and less variable climate of the West Indies. Here after several months, he so far recovered as to return, and once more plunge into the toils of his profession. With few brief interruptions, he continued actively engaged until the summer of 1851, when he became mentally and physically prostrated, and at length after a weary illness of nearly a year, he died at Hartford, Connecticut, on the 6th of September, 1852, in the 65th year of his age.

Dr. Wing was a man acute in his perceptions, ready and keen in his observations. In every respect he was admirably adapted for the profession of his choice. With great skill he united untiring energy of body and mind. His manners were modest, unassuming, unembarrassed. His habits were social, and in conversation he was winning. He at once enlisted the confidence of the patient and inspired him with hope. In the sick room he was kind and affectionate; there he was a model physician, and among his patients he had most devoted friends.

He read much and possessed an accurate and retentive memory, so that he was able to repeat pages, almost *verbatim*, that he had not seen in years. In health, his spirits were buoyant and gay; his laugh was contagious, his fund of anecdote inexhaustible, and used with great aptness. With an extensive acquaintance his society was much sought, and in the profession throughout the State he had a multitude of friends. For political distinction, he had no possible desire, and was, in his disposition, averse to the turmoils of such a life. Yet for many years he was intimate with the leading politicians of the State, and possessed an unseen influence with them.

Dr. Wing had some constitutional peculiarities, but none more annoying to his professional brethren than his habit of delaying

his visits, and appointments for counsel, beyond the time specified. Indeed so proverbial was this, that years before he died he was known as "the late Dr. Wing," a title he enjoyed, whenever he heard it applied.

His counsels were frequently sought, and in critical cases almost uniformly adopted. The most desperate cases he was unwilling to abandon as hopeless. To the junior members of the profession he was uniformly courteous, and exercised towards them a kindness of manner, that has not always characterized seniors in the medical profession.

To the desponding he had always a word of encouragement, and not unfrequently wholesome advice for the presuming and impertinent. With a favorite volume, he took no note of time and was as regardless of the hours of sleep as of business. At length, with such a habit, sleep came unwillingly and with broken slumbers, until disease* grew upon him, and he lost the power of yielding to its soothing and balmy influence. To the poor he was kind and liberal, bestowing upon them his best services without expectation or hope of reward.

Dr. Wing was in every respect a self made man ; to society, and to the profession to which his whole life was enthusiastically devoted he was a great loss.

It has frequently been charged upon physicians that, as a class in religious opinions, they incline to infidelity, and that the study of the science of Anatomy especially tends to scepticism. It is not a point I intend to discuss here, but justice to you, gentlemen, and to many former members of this body, requires that I should on this public occasion declare that the history of this society pronounces the accusation false.

It may be true, indeed that some of the members of this body have lacked in personal piety; but the mass of them have been firm believers in the cardinal doctrines of Christianity.

I have thus, gentlemen, endeavored to bring briefly before you the history of our society, and some of those who have been its prominent and efficient members within the half century, which is now completed.

I am aware how imperfectly the task has been performed. Enough has been said, however, to stimulate us to an increased zeal and fidelity in the great cause of preserving human health, and prolonging human life. There is much in the examples of those gone before us worthy our highest ambition and our nearest

* His disease was softening of the brain, induced in part beyond doubt by insufficient sleep.

imitation. Let us earnestly avail ourselves of the inspirations they impart.

While we mingle our mutual congratulations upon the harmony which exists among us to-day, let us not be unmindful that ere the cycle that marks another half century will be completed, our relations to this society will be terminated. With the memory of those of whom we have spoken, ever revered, let us unite with a common heart, devoted to its best interests, in wishing that blest in its members—

“ Long may it reign of every joy possessed,
To distant years its fame immortal grow,
Its spreading light to rising ages flow;
Till Nature hear the great Archangel's call;
Till the last flames involve this sinking ball.
Then may its sons ascend th' ethereal plains,
And join Seraphic songs, where bliss eternal reigns.”

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